DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 061 601 EA 004 187

AUTHOR Beardsley, Barbara
TITLE Open Plan - Open Education.
PUB DATE 5 Feb 72
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at Ontario Woodsworth Memorial Foundation Conference on Education (Toronto, February 5, 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Innovation; Educational Needs; *Educational Philosophy; Flexible Facilities; Individualized Instruction; *Open Education; *Open Plan Schools; Problem Solving; Speeches; Student Centered Curriculum; *Student Teacher Relationship; Teacher Role; Test Results

ABSTRACT

To adopt open education is a philosophical decision. Open plan schools should be more conducive to a more informal style of teaching. However, it is wise to know what open education means because it is not a panacea for all schools nor for all individuals. A related document is EA 004 184. (Author)

ED 061601

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

OPEN PLAN - OPEN EDUCATION

A paper presented by Barbara Beardsley at the Ontario Woodsworth Memorial Foundation Conference on Education, Toronto, Canada, February 5th, 1972.

EA 004 187

OPEN PLAN - OPEN EDUCATION

Scarcely a day passes without some fresh outburst of criticism of our education system.[1] Some of these criticisms are either-or propositions (basic skills or learn to play) others may be used on either side of the argument ("schools interfere with real education"). Is it not possible for children to learn basic skills and still learn how to develop imagination and to express their feelings?

Open schools are not a panacea which will answer all these critics. In fact, if misused, they may make some of the criticism on the competition-discipline-basic skills side of the fence even more outspoken. However, open plan schools with an open program are one of the alternatives which I believe answer some of the critics who cry irrelevancy and rigidity.

I do not speak to you with the authority or experience of a teacher who has taught in an open plan school. I am a librarian. I worked for five years in the Education Centre Library, and for three years doing educational research. Last year, I spent most of my time trying to evaluate how satisfied students, teachers, parents and neighbors were with eight SEF open plan schools, four non-SEF open plan schools, and four non-SEF traditional plan schools. We also tried to find out both by questionnaires and by direct observation how these schools were being used.

Prior to this evaluation I worked with several of the SEF committees made up of Metro Toronto teachers, principals, and administrators, which tried to analyze current and future educational needs and how they could best be physically accommodated. Some people wanted open programs right away; others wanted to keep things as they were. Flexibility in school buildings was the one approach which would neither hinder nor force change.[2] It was this goal which SEF schools were designed to achieve.

---

[1] See Appendix I

[2a] Metropolitan Toronto School Board, Study of Educational Facilities, Educational Specifications and User Requirements for Elementary (K-6) Schools, Toronto, Ryerson Press, 1968 (SEF Report E1).

[b] Metropolitan Toronto School Board, Study of Educational Facilities, Educational Specifications and User Requirements for Intermediate Schools, Toronto, Ryerson Press, 1969 (SEF Report E2).

[c] Metropolitan Toronto School Board, Study of Educational Facilities, Educational Specifications and User Requirements for Secondary Schools, Toronto, Ryerson Press, 1970 (SEF Report E3).

There are approximately 360 open plan or partially open plan schools in Ontario, few are more than five years old and the majority are one or two years old. More than a third of the open plan schools are in Metropolitan Toronto. Some 46 are open plan additions to existing traditionally built schools, about the same number are new junior schools (kindergarten to grade six) about 25 are senior public or junior high schools and another 25 are separate schools (kindergarten to grade eight). Open plan high schools in Metro are still rare.

I have visited about 30 of these schools but the ones which I know best are the 20 which were built by SEF. None of the open plan schools I have seen is an exact replica of any other. The three SEF schools first built in Scarborough are identical architecturally but they have different priorities. Some people are using open space more imaginatively than others. programs different

If schools are running a completely traditional type of schooling in the open space with each class of 35 students, physically separated from every other class by barriers of bookshelves or room dividers, if the area itself is set up in a traditional pattern of straight rows of desks with the focal point on the teacher's desk or the blackboard, and if they are following a rigid schedule, I believe it is a worse alternative than a traditional program in a traditional plan school. It is exploiting none of the advantages of open space and it has all the disadvantages of visual and aural distractions. Further, the autonomy of a good teacher in a traditional setting is lost.

Some observers feel that it is easier to run a traditional program in an open area school than an open program in a traditional plan school[3] but I disagree. Many, many of the traditionally built schools in Metro are operating extremely open programs, at least in some of their classrooms.

Open program is a difficult concept to define. There are varying degrees and various methods to achieve it. But for me, the essence of an open program is participation and choice, both for the students and the teacher.

I know one principal in a traditionally built school who after a gradual evolvement of program over seven years would now like to be able to wave a wand and be rid of the walls. But she would not have chosen to start an open program in open space.

However, it is my contention that the open area is more conducive to the development of open programs. The open area encourages overflow into all parts of the school, it lends itself to many different activity centres and it increases the chances of interaction of teacher and teacher, student and student, and student and teacher. It may be wise in a new open space school to start the program with the methods and traditions which are known to the teachers and students and only to open up one area of activity at a time. To try to maintain a tight structure in open space leads to frustration.

---

[3] Carioti, Frank, "Open Plan Schools Gain in Numbers and Successes," Schoolhouse, No. 4 (September, 1971) 2.

Some schools maintain it is necessary to run a structured program for mathematics and reading, with various groupings and regroupings of children during the day, and during the year. For some teachers in fact regrouping is the definition of open education. Other teachers complain that regrouping so frequently during a single day, say with phonics with one group of children at 9:20, spelling at 9:40 with a different group, and reading at 10:00 with another, is a highly structured, less open form of teaching than a self-contained classroom.

In some of the new open plan schools in Metro, teachers are learning to co-operate and teaching teams are evolving naturally. A variety of multi-age, multi-grade teams are emerging. Sharing of students and spaces is growing and thematic approaches are being worked out, sometimes with the involvement of children.

It is not easy to categorize all schools as extremely open, extremely closed or even somewhere in between. The mixtures are of such various kinds. I am indebted to a study conducted by Educational Testing Service of Princeton, N.J. for a scheme which has helped me to sort out various approaches in a meaningful way. The range of variability within a type is not always shown but the main features of each are clear.

FOUR TYPES OF SCHOOLING

Categorized by Teacher and Student Contribution

to content and process

HIGH

TYPE III

Child Active
Teacher Passive

STUDENT CHOICE

Poor Progressivism

TYPE IV

Child Active
Teacher Active

STUDENT CHOICE
TEACHER CHOICE

Open Education

Student Contribution of Teacher

LOW ——— HIGH

TYPE I

Child Passive
Teacher Passive

NO CHOICE

Traditional

TYPE II

Child Passive
Teacher Active

TEACHER CHOICE

Good traditional

LOW

Adapted from: Bussis, Anne M., and Chittenden, Edward A. Analysis of an Approach to Open Education. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1970. p. 23

TYPE I: (Traditional)
Child passive
Teacher passive

Materials - stereotyped, or exciting, but set by outside agency

Structure - imposed from above

Teacher - a cog

Student - a product
- evaluated by outside criteria
- comparisons with others made constantly

Characteristics
- "preparation for life"
- there is a body of knowledge all children should know "cover the curriculum"
- rigidity
- boredom
- irrelevancy
- inertia
- joyless

TYPE II: (Good Traditional)
Child passive
Teacher active

Materials - stereotyped plus enrichment material provided by teacher

Structure - imposed from above but mediated by teacher

Teacher - strong individual, cares about education, knows subject well, can communicate, may by inspiring

Student - may work at his own pace, and his own level but has no relevant choices, no decision making

Characteristics
- ? depends entirely on teacher

TYPE III: (P or Progressivism)
Child Active
Teacher Passive

Materials - wide variety - may be poorly chosen
- may be poorly organized

Structure - none

Teacher - supportive, but does not direct
- a bland servant

Student - may or may not be involved
- "Do I have to do what I want?"

Characteristics
- good relationship between students and teacher
- pseudo-intellectual
- possible chaos
- laissez faire

TYPE IV: (Open Education)
Child Active
Teacher Active

Materials - wide variety in all subject areas, arranged in different ways at different times[5]
- well organized
- storage and housekeeping are well attended to

Structure - no one right way
- no fixed curriculum
- no fixed schedule
- talking and movement allowed but reasonable limits maintained
- possibly family groupings

Teacher - teacher is a person
- teacher is actively involved
- teacher provides alternatives
- teacher observes and diagnoses and guides, sometimes structured, sometimes unstructured
- teacher shares information with other teachers

Student - student is a person
- student plans his own activities
- student may work alone or in groups
- student has many opportunities to use environme
- student learns skills as he needs them

Characteristics
- flexibility
- responsibility
- trust
- fluidity of space and time
- respect for children
- honesty
- co-operation and sharing

[5]For an example of how one open classroom teacher changed her basic arrangement five times during the year see Sargent, Belsye, The Integrated Day in an American School, Boston: National Association of Independent Schools, 1970, p. 4-9.

Most of us have been all too familiar with Type I, and were usually grateful for the exceptional teacher ~~which~~ made Type II possible. These two types are indigenous to the self-contained classroom and, as I said earlier, are best accommodated there. Type III can certainly occur in a self-contained classroom but it is more likely to run rampant in open space. When it does, it frequently brings with it a condemnation of all open space education. It is the fear of Type III which may make many principals and teachers try to adapt a Type II program to open space.

Type IV Open Education or the Integrated Day, has been successfully evolved in certain parts of England - Leicestershire, Bristol, Oxforshire, and parts of London, over the last 50 years. More than 70 per cent of all British primary schools have now adopted it. Open space is not a necessary condition but it may help.

Americans seem to have arrived at open space teaching via such organizational innovations as team teaching, nongradedness, individualized instruction, flexible scheduling and independent study. Whereas the British looked at the way children behaved and arrived at open space teaching slowly via a child-centred, experience approach. I think this is what George Dennison means when he says we should not be asking "how can we improve our schools" but rather "how can we educate our young?"[6]

To adopt open education is a philosophical decision. One must recognize the diversity of people and uniqueness of every individual. Basic to the concept is the fact that each child assimilates his culture his own way. It is not an easy decision. Open education requires the commitment by the teacher of a great deal of energy and time both for the preparation of the classroom with an everchanging, evergrowing variety of materials of all kinds, and for a changed teaching style. The style may be formal or informal but the teacher has to learn when to interject, when to guide, when to superimpose her choice over the child's, and especially her choice in the means to help the child.

How does the day proceed? Let me read you a passage.[7]

> As they arrive, the students check the Chore Chart to see what their housekeeping responsibility is for the day. They take turns doing such chores as bringing up the milk, watering the plants, cleaning the animal cage, mixing new paints, sharpening pencils, taking attendance.
>
> Many Open Classroom teachers call a general meeting after the children arrive, focusing on some interesting experiment several children did the day before, something brought from home, an unusual item in the newspaper, or a sentence she has written on the board to be corrected by the class.

---

[6] Dennison, George, The Lives of Children, New York: Random House, 1969, p. 250.

[7] Gross, Beatrice and Gross, Ronald, "A Little Bit of Chaos," Saturday Review, 53 (May 16, 1970) 72-73.

The children squat on their haunches or sit cross-legged in whatever area most comfortably holds the whole group.

After the meeting, children choose the areas in which they would like to begin their day. Some prefer to start quietly reading, curled up in the overstuffed chairs. Some like to get their assigned work out of the way first, but others may not have a choice if the teacher has noticed, for instance, that they have been neglecting math or need work in punctuation, and she tells them that they should start the day working with her. Soon the room is full of action, used as it will be for the remainder of the day, unless some special visitor or specialist focuses the group's attention for a special activity.

The child is free to choose, but whatever choice he makes he will be confronted with a wealth of opportunities for exploration and discovery. In the math section is everything he can use to measure and figure, including the Cuisenaire rods, balance scales, rulers and a stop watch, workbooks, and counting games such as Sorry and Pokerino. Similar riches await him in the language arts section, where he can read, make a tape recording or typewrite, and play word-games and puzzles; or in the arts area with its paints, clay, dyes, and sand. Other corners are devoted to science, music, and blocks.

The child's freedom, autonomy, and independence--as well as his responsibility--are epitomized by the largest and most elaborate of the many charts and pictures around the room. It is the "Activity Chart," and it lists by word and appropriate picture all the possible activities in the room: from reading, typing, playground, painting, right through to visiting and gerbils. Next to each are several hooks, on which the child hangs his name tag to indicate what he's doing. A simple device, but it says much about the respect for the child and the relationship between the child, the teacher, and the room. The equivalent in the conventional classroom is the notorious Delaney Book, still widely used, which represents each student by a little card tucked in a slot corresponding to his desk position, fixing the child in a constrained position, with the teacher clearly in charge.

In the Open Classroom, each child's day is distinctive and different from every other day. To give him a sense of his progress, each child may keep a diary, which is also used to communicate to the teacher. . .

The variety of the activities mentioned in the diaries suggests the highlights of each child's day.

There are still questions which remain unanswered about the open schools at this point:

- Is the open plan school equally relevant for all ages of children, or for all levels of education?[8]

---

[8]One elementary school principal suggests primary school children and senior high school students can adapt to the open. He feels teenagers need a more structured situation. Anderson, D. Carl, "Open Plan Schools: Time for a Peek at Lady Godiva", Education Canada, 10 (No. 2, June, 1970) 3-6. English secondary schools are introducing open education at the secondary level. Yeomans, Edward, "The Integrated Day in English Secondary Schools," Independent School Bulletin, (Dec., 1971) 31-34.

- Can children with learning disabilities be successfully integrated into the open plan?
- Are teachers having to compromise their individuality in order to work co-operatively?[9]
- Can all teachers adapt to the open plan?[10]
- Should teacher education be different for open plan teachers?[11]

- Are the benefits to children which sympathetic observers talk about--greater responsibility, more curiosity and creativity, higher degree of self-confidence, a real understanding of what they are learning--are these benefits measurable? Are they inevitably tied to a higher level of activity?

Research both on open plan schools and on open education has been meagre.[12] Evaluation of academic achievement using standardized tests and procedures has shown that open plan students are no worse off than traditional plan students, although there is some minor but conflicting evidence to show that in mathematics achievement traditional teaching may prepare students slightly better for traditional tests.

Traditional tests, however, are not measuring problem solving ability, innovativeness, maturity, curiosity, nor children's willingness and ability to work together and to share information usefully. It is precisely these outcomes which are most highly valued in open style teaching.

However, after saying all this, I must re-emphasize that open education is not a panacea, neither as a system of education, nor is it a panacea for every individual. Some children may be happier and learn more in a structured situation. Just as I feel that most children would profit from at least a year of free school, and should have an opportunity to try it, so I feel all children should be able to experience open education. Different children, at different times may need entirely different approaches.

Now that more and more people are talking of different kinds of schools within the public school system, now that parents are more welcome in the classroom, the onus is on parents and students to seek out and to choose the kind of schools which fits their values.

---

[9] Several teachers at an open plan conference mentioned this problem. However David Hawkins speaks of "the heightened morale of teachers and their greater openness to investigation within the style of their craft - to professional growth" (Hawkins, David, "Square Two, Square Three," Forum, 12 (No. 1, Autumn, 1969) 4-9.

[11] The New School of Behavioral Studies at the University of North Dakota has estimated that it takes a teacher five years in the classroom to become a first-rate open classroom teacher. (Hapgood, Marilyn, "The Open Classroom: Protect it From its Friends," Saturday Review, 54 (Sept. 18, 1971) 66-9, 75.

[12] Metropolitan Toronto School Board, Study of Educational Facilities, "SEF Bibliography of Research on Open Space Schools," Toronto, 1971, 17 p. mimeo. also "SEF Annotated Bibliography on Open Education," Toronto, 1972. 14 p. mimeo.

[10] Teachers in the open plan should have "the security to be insecure and the ability to associate the disassociated". (Eberle, Robert F., "The Open Space School," Clearing House, 44 (Sept. 1969) 23-28) Also see "What Advice Would You Give to a Teacher Going to Teach in Open Space for the First Time".

Do you believe there is a core body of knowledge which must be learned in a certain sequence by all children at the same time, or do you believe the way the child acquires and uses knowledge is more important? Do you believe education is a preparation for life, or do you believe children should live fully and richly here and now? Do you believe in relevant choices for students and teachers and not a useless kind of choice? (For instance, in a political context, is Canadian capitalism preferable to American capitalism?) ~~And a question which is almost rhetorical when asked of socialists~~, Do you prefer a school setting which emphasizes competition, or one which encourages co-operation?